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ABSTRACT

Noting that Master of Fine Arts (MFA) programs in writing are relatively new as compared to similar programs in dance, music, and painting, and that little is known about the writing progams by those not directly involved, a study sought to determine if (1) the MFA program in writing is a fairly standard entity from program to program, and (2) if the master teacher/student relationship is an important element of instruction as it is in the other MFA programs. An indepth study of programs at the University of Iowa, Bowling Green, and Vermont College was conducted using an interview instrument developed through a pilot study of six professional writers; and 28 MFA programs identified by the Associated Writing Program Catalogue were compared. The findings indicated that the MFA degree is a distinct degree, which despite some variations in requirements, is generally consistent from school to school both theoretically and structurally with each program requiring a manuscript for admission, an average of 48 semester hours for graduation, and an original artistic creation of professional quality as a thesis. Contrary to the norm for other art forms, it is not felt to be desirable for writing students to seek a master teacher with whom to train. (Three tables of data are included, and works cited from 26 colleges, 23 telephone interviews, and 14 bibliographic references are attached.) (NH)

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MASTER OF FINE ARTS PROGRAMS: A COMPREHENSIVE DESCRIPTION

There has existed a feeling that the poetic way of thinking and the academic way of thinking are so antithetical that poetry cannot be taught but must almost be inborn. Artistic writing ability is thought to be a talent which should not be tampered with through education and which cannot be identified in those who posses it until they have so fully demonstrated this talent that they are beyond training. Despite this feeling, however, there has been the effort to teach artistic writing as long as there has been the argument maintaining the uselessness of doing so.

Apart from all the debate on the subject of whether writing can be taught, writing programs have sprung up and have flourished. The existence of these many programs--and of classes and books--is an indication that an assumption is made by those on both sides of the learning table that something can, in fact, be taught. The Writer's Workshop, began at Iowa in 1936, has attracted students from all over the world and continues to attract noted faculty and substantial funding. MFA programs for writers have increased from one in the 1930's to twenty-eight currently.

Myriad articles and books exist on teaching creative writing in the schools, yet most of these deal with teaching the subject on the elementary level, some on the high school level, but very few on the professional level. Little seems to be known about exactly what MFA programs actually are by anyone other than

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people directly involved with them.

Contrasting with training artists in other areas, the instruction in writing is relatively new. In dance, music, and painting, instruction is fairly standardized and has been considered to be the avenue toward becoming an artist in those areas. Carlo Blasis and Edwin Denby's works on the training of dancers are still considered current. Duane and Margaret Saetveit, philharmonic orchestra musicians interviewed for this study, stated that training in music is fairly standard throughout the country with muicians going through a prescribed program.

While dance and music are performing arts as distingusished from the conceiving arts: composing, painting, and writing, the instruction of artists in the area of composing is similar to that in its performing counterpart. According to Joe Fischer, an accomplished painter interviewed for this study, painting likewise has a fairly standard program, and the MFA degree is an accepted mode of becoming a professional in that field as it is in music.

Common to the instruction in all of these art forms is the master teacher/student relationship. Students are expected to seek out an outstanding artist and to train with them in an apprenticeship mode. Although this is generally accepted, Joe Fischer reported that this can have subtlely negative impact on painters as he has seen students unable to produce after they have graduated from MFA programs and no longer have a mentor to

work with.

The questions this study sought to answer were whether the MFA program in writing was a fairly standard entity, or completely divergent from program to program and what the programs consist of: is a master teacher/student relationship an important element of instruction.

The Research Method

For two reasons, this study was limited to the analysis of MFA programs rather than including MA or DA programs: first, the MFA program was designed specifically for writers who expect to emphasize writing as an art form in their lives. Many MA programs with a creative writing emphasis, to the contrary, are modified standard programs which merely allow a creative thesis, but lack a theory or commitment to the student as artist.

The second reason for limiting the study is that, as reflected in the Associated Writing Programs Catalogue, there is a significant difference between the requirements for an MFA degree and an MA degree with creative emphasis or option.

Brochures and other material from the twenty-eight MFA programs listed in the AWP Catalogue were analyzed for the first part of the study, then three programs were selected to be studied in depth with interviews conducted with five individuals from each of the three programs: the director, two faculty, and two students.

A pilot study was conducted of six writers in varying levels of professional achievement in order to test the interview

instrument. The writers for the pilot study had not attended MFA programs and thus gave a perspective of the programs from an outside viewpoint. Half of them would have attended MFA programs, but for one reason or another, such programs had not been available to them. One of these writers invisioned the well constructed program to be fairly rigid, yet emphasized that in her own preparation, a great deal of flexibility had been essential for her.

Interviewing students as well as faculty and directors of programs served not only as a reliability check on perceived structure, but also as a means of determining whether students' goals in the programs were the same, or compatible with, the faculty and administrators goals.

The basis on which programs were selected was reputation among writers, references in literature, commendations of former students, and orientation of the program to writers specifically. Programs which varied little in their description in the AWP Catalogue from the description of an MA degree were not selected. Some programs which were hastily constructed in the past ten years or so have disappeared just as hastily.

The University of Iowa was selected because of the fact that it is the oldest program; more is written about it than about any other MFA program. It has gained worldwide attention by attracting both students and funding, and it has a valued position within the University of Iowa. A mark of the wide reputation it has even among those not interested in the field of

writing, is Lisa Birnbach's mention in her review of the nation's colleges that The University of Iowa is famous for its Writer's Workshop.(124) In addition, the literature from other programs claim as drawing points similarities to, and faculty graduated from, both the Iowa and the Bowling Green programs. Iowa is not average, but is representative in that others try to be like Iowa. It manifests the swivel effect: everyone looks to the premier program.

Bowling Green is also among the older programs in the country and has achieved a word of mouth reputation among writers and those interested in writing. Philip O'Connor of the Bowling Green program stated that they did not want to advertize their program, but wanted to rely on writers and teachers of writing who knew of them to spread the word about their program. They have succeeded. When MFA programs are discussed, Bowling Green is a program that is usually brought up.

The Vermont College program is a relatively new one. It was selected on the basis of Birtha's article and also because of its description in the AWP Catalogue. It is one of two programs which are based on a four week per year residency with most of the work being done at the writer's home in correspondence and consultation with an advisor. The work in this program is done on a contract basis. The program has an obvious appeal to the older writer with commitments and obligations which would preclude residencies of two years in a more typical program.

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Findings from Program Literature

Table I lists the twenty-eight MFA programs identified by the Associated Writing Programs Catalogue, and the number of hours required as well as the type of degree as determined from the listings and from the publications of the programs. The first item of interest is the number of hours required by the programs for completion of the degree. We can see from the table that the hours vary from a requirement of 36 semester hours at four programs to 60 semester hours at five programs. The program at Sarah Lawrence requires an additional thesis for which no credit is allotted. The thesis would be worth at least six credits at other programs meaning that their degree requirement is equivalent to from 42 to 48 hours rather than the listed 36 hours. The four programs of the quarter system all require 72 quarter hours, which is equivalent to 48 semester hours. This means that of the twenty-eight programs, fourteen require 48 semester hours with an additional two programs very close to that at 45 and 40 hours. The remaining twelve programs are nearly evenly split with half requiring twelve more credit hours for completion of the degree and half requiring twelve less credits for degree completion.

Tables II and III describe the more specific requirements of the various programs.

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TABLE I

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

PROGRAM	DEGREE DESCRIPTION	HOURS*	YEARS IN RESIDENCE
1 University of Alabama	Studio/Academic	48	3
2 University of Alaska	S/A	45	2
3 American University	S/A	48	2
4 University of Arizona	S/A	48	2-3
5 University of Arkansas	S/A	60	
6 Bowling Green State University	S	40	2
7 University of British Columbia	S	18-21 units	2
8 Brooklyn College, City U of NY	S	36	
9 University of California, Irvine	S/A	72 quarter/hrs	2
10 Cornell University	S/A	40	2
11 Eastern Washington University	S/A	72 q/h	2
12 George Mason University	S/A	48	48 hrs
13 Indiana University	S/A	60	2
14 University of Iowa	S	48	
15 University of Massachusetts	S/A	60	
16 McNeese State University	S/A	60	2
17 University of Michigan	S/A	48	2
18 University of Montana	S/A	72 q/h	
19 University of NC, Greensboro	S/A	36	2
20 University of Oregon	S or S/A	72 q/h	2
21 University of Pittsburgh	S/A	36	2
22 Sarah Lawrence College	S	36+	2
23 Vermont College of Norwich U	S/A	48	
24 Virginia Commonwealth University		48	
25 University of Virginia	S/A	36	2
26 Warren Wilson College	S/A	60	
27 Western Michigan University	S/A	48	
28 Wichita State University	S/A	48	

*Semester hours unless otherwise noted

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TABLE II

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS*

PROGRAM	WORKSHOPS	THESIS	LIT COURSES	INTERDISCIPLINE	LANGUAGE
1 Alabama	18-24	to 6	24 or more		reading prof.
2 Alaska	3-6	6	27	6	
3 American U	12-24	required	12	12 specified	
4 Arizona	18-21	12-18	12-18	option	
5 Arkansas	15-18	6	24		
6 Bowling Green	16+	to 6		encouraged	
7 British Columbia	9-18 units	3 units			
8 CUNY/ Brooklyn	12	required	12		
9 California	48 q/h	required	24 q/h		
10 Cornell	16	required	16-24		proficiency
11 E. Washington	15-20 q/h	6-12 q/h	15-20 q/h	10 q/h	
12 George Mason	15-24	6	15-24	3-6 specified	
13 Indiana	16+	4-12	16 or more	4 specified	
14 Iowa	to 24	to 12			
15 Massachusetts	24	6	24	6 related fld.	proficiency
16 McNeese State	12-15	6	27-30		
17 Michigan	24	required	12-20	6	proficiency
18 Montana	18+ q/h	12-15 q/h	9-20 q/h	6 q/h	
19 NC, Greensboro	6-12	6	12-18		
20 Oregon	9-36 q/h	18 q/h	18-45 q/h		
21 Pittsburgh	9-21	to 6	12-21		encouraged
22 Sarah Lawrence		required	arranged	encouraged	
23 Vermont College	required	required	arranged	arranged	
24 Virginia Cmnwlth	15	6	12	12 specified	
25 Virginia	12	6	12		
26 Warren Wilson	required	required	arranged	arranged	
27 Western Michigan	12-18	6	6+		proficiency
28 Wichita State	to 12	2-6	12-26	6	

*Semester hours unless otherwise noted

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TABLE III

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS*

PROGRAM	OTHER WRTG COURSES/TUTORIALS,DIR.RDG./WRITTEN EXAM/ORAL EXAM/DATE BEG.				
1 Alabama	up to 6	to 6	required		
2 Alaska	6-12	to 12	required	required	1968
3 American U	12-24	required		required	
4 Arizona	6-18	6-9	option	option	
5 Arkansas	9-12	6-9			
6 Bowling Green	18	5		required	1964
7 British Columbia		to 9 units		required	1965
8 CUNY/ Brooklyn		12	required		
9 California	up to 8 q/h		required		1965
10 Cornell				required	
11 E. Washington	10 q/h		required		
12 George Mason	3-12		required		
13 Indiana	4 or more				1980
14 Iowa			required		1936
15 Massachusetts				required	
16 McNeese State	12-15		required	required	
17 Michigan					
18 Montana	to 9 q/h	to 6 q/h		required	
19 NC, Greensboro		6-12	required		
20 Oregon	to 9 q/h	to 27 q/h	required		1960
21 Pittsburgh	3-6				
22 Sarah Lawrence					
23 Vermont College					
24 Virginia Cmnwlth					
25 Virginia				required	
26 Warren Wilson					1981
27 Western Michigan	8 or more	to 8			
28 Wichita State	6-18	to 9	required	required	1974

*Semester hours unless otherwise noted

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ANALYSIS OF TABLES AND PROGRAM LITERATURE

From the literature distributed by the programs, it is clear that the MFA degree is understood to be a degree for writers as fine artists which consists of 48 semester hours of work on the average. The degree contains in all cases some workshop requirement. It also carries the requirement of a book length thesis which must be the student´s own artistic work. The other requirements of the degree vary depending upon the emphasis on writing rather than on the traditional requirements for the master´s degree. Some programs require more background work than do others.

Tables I, II, and III indicate that the MFA programs are consistent in terms of the number of hours required in view of varying requirements for the PhD degree at different institutions. Although there is a variance of 24 semester hours for the MFA degree, that is less variance than the requirements printed for the doctoral programs listed in the AWP Catalogue. For example the PhD program at Florida State University requires 60 semester hours beyond the BA degree,(40) while the program at SUNY Binghamton requires 48 hours beyond the MA degree, a total of 72-78 hours,(109) while the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, requires 54 hours beyond the BA.(127)

In addition, within some departments of divisions in graduate colleges there are differences in requirements as

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is the case in the Learning and Instruction department at SUNY at Buffalo, where it is stated in the doctoral literature:

> It should be noted that the Faculty of Educational Studies requires a minimum of 72 graduate hours for graduation; this, however, falls short of the 89 hours required by LAI and 72 hours will not be sufficient for graduation.(9)

This indicates a seventeen hour variance in hour requirements within a specific graduate college of a single university. The MFA degree, therefore, appears to be fairly consistent in basic concept being described as a studio or studio and academic degree with a typical requirement of 48 semester hours and a two year residency.

The programs all have an element of studio work in their makeup. Those described as studio are the most flexible regarding additional requirements. Generally, as we can see from the table, the programs described only as studio tend to require few set courses in literature, and they encourage a large number of credits in actual writing courses or workshops. Five programs require a proficiency in a foreign language. Most programs require written examinations and a number of them require oral defense of thesis. Some programs such as McNeese and Vermont require a public reading of the thesis. Eastern Washington and

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Indiana require some hours in secondary education in order to prepare writers for some source of income other than writing, which these programs recognize as not being a source of support. Other programs such as Greensboro maintain that their graduates find jobs in a number of fields and, "we feel strongly that the student who does not plan to teach should not be forced to prepare for a career in which he has no interest."(AWP Bulletin 76)

Some programs have elements which are unusual and may have particular appeal to some writers. American University, for example, has among its requirements a practicum which may be fulfilled by internships in such places as the Folger Shakespeare Library or the Library of Congress. Both Warren Wilson and Vermont College have tutorial programs in which the students spend most of their time corresponding with faculty advisors relative to their work and spend intense two week periods on campus. This obviously would have great appeal to the older student with job or family commitments.

All of the programs cite publications of their faculty in their brochures and most list an extensive visiting writers program. Arizona, Alabama, Bowling Green, Iowa, Vermont, and Wichita also list student awards and publications in their literature.

All of the programs require submission of a portfolio of writing for admission to the program. In most cases,

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however, application must first be made to the associated graduate school. In some cases, programs request the manuscript first and state that in rare cases they will take a particularly talented writer without a BA degree. Others, such as Arkansas, adhere strictly to the criteria set up and state, "...in many cases...a young writer's particular gifts might develop faster and better outside the academic scene."(AWP Bulletin 6) Arkansas states that their program is particularly suited to the writer who plans to teach at the college or university level.

The University of Iowa program states that,

> Though we agree in part with the popular insistence that writing cannot be taught, we exist and proceed on the assumption that talent can be developed, and we see our possibilities and limitations in that light. Accordingly, the fact that the Workshop can claim as alumni nationally and internationally prominent poets and novelists is, we believe, more the result of what they brought here than of what they gained from us. We continue to look for promising talent in our conviction that writing cannot be taught but that writers can be encouraged.
>
> The course of study leading to the degree is very flexible.(AWP Bulletin 51)

The Wichita State University Alumni Report tells of

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the tenth anniversary of their writing program stating that they looked to Iowa for their model terming it "the premier creative writing program in the country."(11) They also cite Bowling Green and add, "When we got our authorization for the 1973-74 year there were 11 other programs. There are 28 now."(11) Many of the programs were started by Iowa graduates. Hence, if for no other reason, one could expect some similarity. In some cases, however, there are changes in the program based on the experience of the Iowa graduates. For instance, at Wichita, they focus the program on attracting other students than typically go to Iowa in that they want students with "broader experiences."

The typical aspects of the MFA programs are the emphasis on a recognized and published faculty, a requirement of a two year residency with 48 semester hours being both the average and mean number required, enough flexibility to encourage development of writing, a book length thesis in the student´s chosen art form, and the submission of a manuscript upon application to the program ensuring a professional emphasis. Sarah Lawrence College states, "In the end, the single most important factor for admission is the quality and adventurousness of the work submitted."(AWP Bulletin 124) Wichita states, "Applicants...must submit a portfolio of work that demonstrates sufficient evidence of accomplishment and promise to ensure successful participation in the

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program."(AWP Bulletin 124) With this requirement, programs ensure that the applicants are serious in intent and are not simply interested in trying their hand at writing.

CONCLUSIONS FROM INTERVIEWS

The interviews of individuals from the three programs give a picture of what the degree is like at the various institutions. Each program has similarities as they also have aspects which are distinct and tend to give a unique character to each one.

Points of Consistency

In all cases, not only is the submission of the manuscript of the student's work required, but it is the primary criterion for admission. The merit of the manuscript is the sole criterion for admission to the program itself at both Iowa and Bowling Green. At Vermont, due to the need for the student to work independently for most of the year, an essay indicating the student's ability to work and interest in working on his or her own is also weighted heavily. Since the degree is a terminal graduate degree, admissions requirements to the graduate college to which the programs are attached are also necessary. These requirements, however, have been waived at each of the programs in special cases where the writing ability talent has warranted it, and appropriate arrangements have been made for supplementing the work missed in background

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preparation.

The Writer´s Workshop

In all the programs, the writer´s workshop is understood to have the same structure. In fact, even in the pilot study in which the writers had not attended MFA programs, the workshop was understood to be structurally equivalent, signifying that the general term "writer´s workshop" applies to a fairly standardized entity.

In every case, the description of the writer´s workshop was the same with little variation. The procedure of the workshop is as follows:

1. The students submit work which is printed on a sheet and distributed to the other students prior to the workshop meeting.
2. The students are to have read the work more than once and have marked comments on their copy prior to the meeting.
3. The instructor generally asks for comments on the work or the instructor may begin by making comments of her or his own first.
4. The writer may respond to the comments made.

The variations which may occur are as follows:

1. The instructor may be the one to select what is put on the worksheet depending upon a point she or he wants to make, or may simply ask students for work, and have all

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the work printed. The instructor generally makes sure that each person's work is discussed at least once during the semester.

2. This step does not vary.

3. The work on the worksheet may or may not be anonymous. The instructor's manner of response may be more or less directive depending on personality. The instructor may begin the comments or may have students begin. The instructor will generally set the record straight if he or she feels students are off track.

Most instructors will insist that comments made be constructive and instructive. Some instructors will encourage harsh, or occasionally cutthroat response. None of the students interviewed for this study reported encountering that within these programs. Some of the faculty, however, had dealt with students in the past who had encountered this type of instructor. Great effort is made not to hire, or if hired, not to retain, instructors who will be destructive in their comments in the workshop. It is generally felt that the proper stance for the workshop instructor is to be demanding, but not harsh; considerate, but not weak.

4. In some workshops, it is required that the writer wait until all comments are made before he or she may respond to the other students' comments; in others, the writer may respond or explain his or her work at any time.

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Objectives and Theory of MFA Programs

The objectives of the programs are essentially consistent. In every case the respondents stated that the objective was to develop the writer´s individual talent and ability by giving each the opportunity to focus on the writing. Since writers enter the program at different levels, the objective is to have each student become a better writer in relation to where that student was upon entrance.

Although the answer to the question, "Can creative writing be taught?" differed somewhat, the sense of the answer was the same. The informants replied that while innate talent cannot be created or destroyed, there are many elements of technique that can be taught. There are shortcuts that can be learned. As Howard McCord stated, the apprenticeship can be shortened. Craftsmanship is taught in techniques courses and in the workshop. In the workshop close reading with a critical eye is also taught. The objective of the writing courses is to teach craft and use of craft through ability to revise and to see weaknesses.

Specifics of Background, Prerequisites, and Curricula

Entrance criteria are the same as mentioned above. In all cases, the programs are looking for the most talented writers. The manuscript is all important. At most programs, the manuscript is that which indicates the

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seriousness of the writer, while Vermont requires an additional essay for indication of the student´s ability to work alone.

In no case were publications or honors or prizes considered to be a criterion for admission. Since the purpose of the programs is to train students as professional artists, and since publications, honors, and prizes are considered the mark of professionalism, the students are expected to achieve that standard upon exit, not entrance.

During the course of the program at each institution, flexibility is stressed. At Vermont and to a lesser extent at Bowling Green, there is some effort on the part of the advisors to look into a student´s background including individual reading and indicate what areas are weak and need building. At Bowling Green, the advisor will recommend readings or courses in areas needing improvement; at Vermont, the advisor will build readings into a contract worked out between the advisor and the student. At Iowa flexibility is all important. John Leggett stated that the program is really a gift of time. Iowa, among all the programs, has had more time to make changes. The program has moved toward greater flexibility since the 1960´s. The assumption is made that the students are serious writers and will have read. They are encouraged to take courses in any area that interests them

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in the entire university. At Bowling Green, where students are similarly encouraged, Ken Shedd reported that he and fellow students had taken advantage of that opportunity and had taken courses in anthropology and other fields of interest. When asked what she felt students gained the most from, Barbara McMillen replied, "A lot of elbow room."

At every program, the thesis, which is an artistic piece of writing, is required and is worked on during the course of study. Classes which contribute to the quality of the thesis are the major requirement. At each program, one techniques course must be taken in the student's chosen genre. A workshop must be taken each semester.

Standards for Evaluation

Evaluation of Students:

In no case is individual work ever graded. Performance for the semester is evaluated. At Vermont this evaluation, in narrative form, is done twice a semester by both the advisor and student. In all cases, the programs rely primarily upon their careful admissions process to make any form of course grade more a question of formality than a necessary element of the program. Although a student can fail a course at each of the programs, it is rare for this to happen due to the general seriousness of the students. Iowa grades the workshops at this time only on a pass/fail basis. There is awareness at

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each program that the more innovative a work is, the more likely that it will have initial negative impact. In evaluation of the semester's material or material submitted for a workshop, a great deal of effort is made to determine that the student understands and essentially agrees, insofar as possible, with the evaluation. The evaluation incorporates dialogue with the student.

Evaluation of Program:

In every case, programs look for faculty with a publishing record. They also look for faculty with a teaching record. There is division within programs as to whether publishing or teaching is more important. The relative importance tends to be weighted 60/40 with disagreement as to whether publishing or teaching is the 60. Two individuals felt that publishing was not nearly as important as teaching ability. No one felt that teaching ability, in terms of willingness to deal with students on their work, was unimportant. At each of the programs, they want people who are willing to spend time on the students' work. Only three people mentioned advanced degrees as a requirement. Most faculty in the programs will have MFA or PhD degrees, but with sufficient publishing background and an ability to work well with students an advanced degree is not essential.

In evaluating the program, most of the respondents indicated that they looked at the record of graduated students

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in formulating their judgment regarding program effectiveness. They also considered what was happening with student work during the course and felt that it improved significantly. In addition, students evaluated the program considering whether it satisfied the purposes they had upon entering the program. In every case, the programs did satisfy those goals and in most cases offered more than the student expected.

At each of the programs evaluation is clearly an ongoing process. Bowling Green has a committee with students participating which continually reviews curricula. Vermont reviews curricula at every residency through a faculty committee. Iowa reviews its program and solicits input from students who have graduated from the program. The newness of the MFA degree compared to the BA, MA, or PhD lends to constant evaluation in order to assess its validity, although the degree at Iowa is now sufficiently tested that it is well respected in the university.

Organization

The programs are essentially similar in concept, but have differences which are primarily dictated by structure. The hours required for obtaining the degree at the programs differ: Iowa requires 48; Vermont requires 48; Bowling Green requires 40. These differences are more superficial than might appear on first glance, however. For example, Bowling Green allows a maximum of 6 hours for the thesis,

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while Iowa allows 12 hours. Since the thesis must be completed at both programs, the Bowling Green student must do the work whether or not credit is received for it.

At all programs, classes are kept small. During the mid to late sixties, classes were quite large at the Iowa program. This has been changed so that there are now no more than fifteen in a workshop. Similarly, at Bowling Green there are nine to twelve students in a typical workshop and there are never more than fifteen. At Vermont, each faculty member corresponds with six students during the year. At the residencies, the workshops consist of twelve to fourteen students.

None of the programs formally deals with job preparation or publishing, although all of the programs are sensitive to the needs of their students and provide opportunities for preparation in teaching and provide other job related information. The feeling in general is that the program exists for the artistic training and should not be contaminated with commercial aspects. All of the students at Bowling Green and at Vermont do some teaching as do most at Iowa. It is recognized that, in the words of a respondent, no one ever makes a living at writing although every now and then someone makes a killing. Students seem to be as aware of this as are staff members and generally have some idea of how they plan to make a living while they pursue their artistic interests.

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At each of these programs, students are expected to spend two years. It is felt that the experience of concentrating on writing and being actively involved with other writers is an important part of the experience. The programs do not want a student to rush through and thereby miss out on the ambiance which is considered to be an important aspect of the program.

Master Teacher/Student Relationship

None of the programs encourage a master teacher/ student relationship. Of the people interviewed, two faculty members stated that it would be all right if it happened, but that such a relationship would not be encouraged and that most students did not seem to desire or need this. Most faculty members felt that a master teacher/ student or mentor relationship would be disastrous and should be actively avoided and discouraged if not outright prevented. The two faculty members who were not strongly opposed to a mentoring relationship nonetheless stated that students need to work with various faculty members and not with just one person.

All of the students stated that they did not have anything that could be referred to as a master teacher/ student relationship although most reported that they had good relationships with several faculty members and felt a close association with them. Two students stated that they had not sought a mentoring relationship and felt that such a relationship would have been strongly objectionable to

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them.

Given that in other art forms the standard manner of instruction involves the student's being taught by a master, the consistency of the response to this item is surprising. There is strong feeling on the part of students and faculty that the student should not be overly influenced by one person. The work of art produced by the student should not be recognized as coming from the specific program or from an MFA program in general. The students graduating from the program should not be copies or junior versions of any of the faculty. It is felt by most of the respondents that a mentoring relationship would unavoidably lead to this.

It is easy to see why this difference might exist between the performing arts and the conceiving arts. If there is a truly outstanding violin player, there is no disadvantage in students attempting to be as much like that performer as possible; the closer the student can come to performing like the master, the better. Contrarily, in the conceiving arts no artist should be a copy of another. A painter who paints like Rembrandt or Picasso is merely someone who paints like a particular artist; he is not an artist in his own right. A composer who composes music like Stravinsky will never be known. Interestingly, however, it is typical in both musical composition and painting for instruction to be done through a master

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teacher/ student relationship. Although this is typical, Joe Fisher felt that this form of instruction was often harmful to the student in that many students became too dependent upon the master teacher and were unable to produce after leaving the program.

Attitude of Respondents

Although attitude of those interviewed was not an aspect which the research intended to consider, the enthusiasm of the informants was striking. This enthusiasm was apparent in fourteen of the fifteen respondents and was reflected in the length of the interviews and the willingness to be interviewed at times that were often not completely convenient. It was also reflected in the thoughtfulness with which the questions were answered. There was an obvious interest in the questions of a theoretical nature. This level of enthusiasm could not be artificially engendered by an attempt to toe the party line, for in that instance, the informants would have been unable to respond as distinctively as they did. Fourteen of the fifteen respondents felt that the programs were very good and most had extremely high praise for them. The fifteenth informant felt that the program was not better than fair, although he gained from it the things for which he originally entered the program. In all cases, the informants reported that the program fulfilled what they saw to be its purpose and objective. It would appear from

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the positive attitudes of those interviewed that these programs are exciting places to study and to work.

Points of Divergence

Not surprisingly, one area of difference was in what was regarded to be the most important aspect of the program: that from which students benefit and gain most. Interestingly, all of those interviewed at Iowa stressed the importance of the writing community. In order to give perspective, students were selected who had graduated from the workshop a number or years ago, and they responded just as did the faculty and director who are currently at the workshop. Both students mentioned the significance of the community of writers in a fairly noncompetitive environment. This was seen as being an exciting, stimulating atmosphere at the time and as being the element to which they look back as a major contribution to their education.

The community of writers was also mentioned at both Bowling Green and Vermont, but not exclusively nor as emphatically as it was at Iowa. At Bowling Green in addition to the community, the aspects of the program from which students benefited most were listed as gain in self-confidence, awareness of potential as a writer, two years of response to their work by knowledgeable readers, and elbow room.

At Vermont, community was also considered to be

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important inspite of the fact that students spend only four weeks a year with the other students. The two fortnight periods appear to be intense enough that strong bonds are formed. In addition to community, the gains in technical skill, self-confidence, and independence were felt to be important.

Although the elements mentioned as important at other programs were also considered important at Iowa, there was not the emphasis upon the importance of community at other programs as there was at Iowa.

Structure

An obvious difference among the programs is the structure. This is most noticeable at the Vermont program with its two residency periods and semesters spent in correspondence with advisors. These differences appear to be more superficial than significant, however. At the other two programs, the workshop is the most important structural part of the program. Workshops are held at Vermont on a daily basis during the residency periods and work is done individually during the semester. At the other programs, the work which is presented at the workshop must be done on the student´s on time also.

At Vermont, a public reading of one´s work is required prior to graduation and the teaching of a one hour class is also required. There appears to be a greater emphasis on reading and on the requirement of a technical paper during

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the third semester.

At Bowling Green every student is given financial assistance and is required to teach freshman composition. The teaching of composition is considered important training in editorial ability.

Relationship to the University

The area of greatest difference among the programs was the relationship to the rest of the university. Vermont is not connected to a university with other terminal degrees. Their program appears to be more autonomous than the other two.

Doris Grumbach stated that at Iowa the Writers' Workshop was "the jewel of the university." All those interviewed from Iowa made similar statements. The university is internationally known for its Writers' Workshop. The president of the university takes the visiting writers out to dinner. The banks in the town will display things from the workshop. The university, the town, and the state appear to be proud of the Workshop and of the attention and the people it attracts.

The program at Bowling Green does not appear to enjoy such status. Four of the five respondents at Bowling Green stated that they felt the MFA program was in the position of second class citizen, although Phil O'Connor added that it was a well heeled second class citizen. One of the students noted that people tended to scoff when students

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mention that they are in the writing program. Given the significant accrual of publications and awards by the of the Bowling Green program, one wonders why it is not more highly valued on its own turf. Yet it is clear from Stephen Wilbers' book on the Iowa Workshop, that the Iowa program did not always enjoy a position of such honor as it now holds. Much of the success of the Iowa program is due to its being run by strong personalities, one in particular, who enjoyed native son status at a time when regionalism was particularly strong and was expressed through cultural appreciation in general and the Workshop in particular.(Wilbers)

Howard McCord explains that there is a tradition for the writer to be suspect because his product is so much imagination that it seems not to be worth very much. Philip O'Connor also takes the lack of status in stride and concentrates upon protecting the student from the negative effects of this attitude. The program is constructed to insist upon and protect the perceived need for the writer to have as flexible a program as possible.

SUMMARY OF GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The MFA degree is a distinct degree, which despite some variation in requirements, is generally consistent both theoretically and structurally. Theoretically, it is assumed that students entering the programs are artists who take their work and their education seriously and are

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sufficiently motivated to play a major role in the selection of their course of study. The need for a flexible program is, therefore, considered essential.

The primary criterion for admission both at the three programs studied in depth and those listed in the AWP Bulletin is the required manuscript.

The programs are generally considered to be two year degrees with a mean of 48 semester hours required. As the Iowa program formerly required 60 semester hours, regression toward the mean seems to be in effect.

The workshops are the hub of the programs around which the other requirements revolve. The writers' workshop is a standard entity recognized from one program to another. Some techniques course or work is required.

Most programs have some level of visiting writers series and most require either an oral or written comprehensive exam.

In all cases, the culmination of the program is the thesis, which must be the student's original artistic creation and must represent a professional quality of work selected from among the student's work produced during the course of the program.

Contrary to the norm for other art forms, it is not felt to be desirable for writing students to seek a master teacher and work only with that individual. The mentor relationship is discouraged by the programs and was not sought by the

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students interviewed for this study. The teachers are, however, expected to be masters as in all cases faculty are expected to have a strong publishing record. It is the relationship with one master teacher that is discouraged.

IMPLICATIONS

As flexibility is an aspect of the programs which is considered essential, the implications of the need for flexibility are significant. Also significant is the fact that those who teach creative writing on various levels look to professional writers for guidance in teaching and that those teaching on advanced levels have felt confident in giving advice to those teaching on a different or lower level.(Jacobsen 45) When one considers the literature on teaching creative writing on the elementary and secondary level in conjunction with an understanding of how writing as an art is taught professionally, a clearer understanding of the needs on a more elementary level develops.

Flexibility

The emphasis upon flexibility means that the students must be mature and dedicated to their own education. Three students referred to the "unevenness" of the degree. They stated that one student could do a great deal more work for the degree than another student. This was more apparent at Vermont, where one advisor may require more work for completion of a contract than another advisor. It is also a factor at the other programs. Four of the five students

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stated that although there was nothing to force them to do the work they felt they needed to do, they completed the work they personally felt was necessary. One student stated that he and other students took courses in anthropology and music and took advantage of the encouragement to take electives offered throughout the university. Another, however, stated that if one knows one needs extra work but is not required to take the extra courses, the temptation is very strong not to do the additional work. This student did not do the extra background work which he felt he should have had and consequently felt disappointed in the degree.

The rationale of Philip O´Connor, who set up the Bowling Green program, for not instituting more requirements was that in his view, if everything he felt a writer needs were required in the program, it would take at least seven years to complete the degree. If a student felt that due to the direction his or her own writing were taking, he or she needed to take a course in Russian literature, but was required to take Beowulf, Chaucer, and numerous other courses, there would be no opportunity for the student to follow the direction necessary. The students´ knowledge of their individual artistic needs would be frustrated.

In addition, due to the extremely diverse backgrounds of the students in each of the three programs, it would be impossible to require courses that, although needed by one

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student, would not be repetitious for another. The student who majored in biology as an undergraduate may need a course in the history of criticism. The student who majored in literature would probably find being forced to take such a course a frustrating waste of time.

The success of the programs based on the premise of the need for flexibility depends, therefore, upon the maturity of the students. It appears that in most cases the programs are successful in getting students who are mature and who take their work seriously and professionally. When they are serious, they will take the necessary courses. Those who attend the programs for the purpose of developing their writing (which is the expressed purpose of the programs) will be aware that they will frustrate their own goals if they fail to do the necessary work.

For this reason, unevenness in the degree may only be a problem when the degree is used as a credential for obtaining a job as a teacher. Even in this instance, the seriousness of the difficulty may not be significant. One would expect appointment committees, department chairs, and college presidents to look at transcripts before hiring an individual. The graduate who had the fewest possible courses on his or her transcript would be at an obvious disadvantage.

The faculty and directors of the programs feel, at this point, that the admission process is successful enough

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that in most cases they succeed in attracting the kind of student who is sufficiently motivated that the current flexible structure works.

Implications for Background Preparation

As the primary criterion for admission to the programs is the quality of the manuscript, it is clear that good preparation prior to admission is essential. Wallace Stegner presented an example of a student who would clearly not achieve in a workshop environment due to a pathethic lack of preparation.(Jacobsen 130-1) Samuel Withers argues that creative writing should not be taught in high school because exposition alone is necessary for a creative writer.(313) This is true if--but only if--creative writing is taught in lieu of the more structured expository writing. Both Joan Murray and Manny Fried, interviewed for the pilot study, emphasized that they had mastered writing early, and had the basics before they began creative writing.

Most of the writers interviewed for the study reported that they began writing early. Some state they began later, although John Leggett feels that generally when students answer that they just began writing, this tends to fall down in probing and one finds that they have actually begun writing earlier. Leslie Ullman stated that she began writing in her twenties, and Doris Grumbach states that she began at the age of fifty-three. Both of these writers, however, report receiving attention for other forms of

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writing. They had mastered the significant elements of exposition and did well at it. They were comfortable with writing and were able to express themselves clearly.

Creative Writing Instruction in the Schools

If one is going to draw on the teaching of professional writers to indicate how creative writing should be taught or at least not stymied in grade school, and educators do,(Jacobsen 43) it is clear that teaching proper form and structure cannot be neglected. Students who cannot write correctly will not get very far.

One might then ask if John Ciardi is correct when he complains, "There seems to be a need to praise the young, no matter what they´ve done, at least the public school system is dedicated to this." He continues, "...supposing this 5th-grade exercise were in how to play the piano. What did Kenneth Koch do about this? Could you be that permissive?"(Jacobsen 45) Yet as anyone knows who has been to a child´s music recital, praise and recognition are paid to renditions which are good only in view of that fact that someone very young or inexperienced is the performer.

We learn from an article by Jeff Morley what Koch did feel about the performance of the students to whom he taught poetry. Koch states that "...the point of his poetry classes was never to train future poets any more than the point of gym classes is to produce future Reggie Jacksons." (Morely 5) Morley was a pupil in the now famous school, P.S. 61, where Koch taught the poetry now immortalized in

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Wishes, Lies, and Dreams. Morley describes Koch's class from the child's point of view:

> I was a new kid in the winter of 1969; Tommie and much of the rest of the class had welcomed this teacher before. But like the time he tried to translate a dirty joke from Spanish, Tommie couldn't quite convey to me the hidden pleasure of what was involved. Then "Mr. Coke" himself strolled in, and the room bubbled over into a recess riot of desk thumping, foot stomping, laughing, squealing, saying hello, hand waving, and talking. His name--he wrote it on the blackboard--was Kenneth Koch. He was tall, upright, polite as a grown-up but sly as a kid, and the first thing he said was, "Let's take a walk."
>
> More gleeful pandemonium. We all got up and paraded around the room...
>
> ...We put our number-two pencils to our wide-lined paper, and the noise ebbed--this Koch was serious about writing poems--leaving a sudden absorbed silence.(1)

The joy described here should be given, if possible, to all school children. There is no need to identify the future novelists and poets in a program such as this any more than there is a need to identify the future Reggie

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Jacksons in order to justify gym class.

Eliza Bailey was another student in Morley´s class who "... remembers P.S. 61 as `a prison and when Mr. Koch came it was like getting out´."(4) Now a teacher, she finds, however, that when one is teaching a class all the time, it is not possible to have the excitement and energy constantly. She states, "You have to say, `When we write poetry you´re allowed to do that; when we´re not writing poetry you have to stop and salute.´"(4)

This, in essence, is the answer to the dilemma faced by all instructors of conceiving arts of needing to offer freedom, yet also needing to instill the mundane skills of the craft. Students should be given time to practice creative writing, yet should know that at other times they must pay more conscious attention to rules. Without this, as Samuel Withers states, they will not be able to become future novelists or poets.(311)

As argued by Withers (313) and Morley (4), students should not be graded for their creative writing. Poems should not be graded any more than race or creed should be graded. We know from the study by Taylor and Hoedt that praise without correction is superior to blame.(80) The children who were criticized on their writing improved in their writing as much as those who received only praise, but they produced much less, did not like the work, wanted to stop, and worse, developed negative self-images.(83)

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While there is disagreement in the literature as to whether or not poems and short stories should be graded, there is universal agreement in MFA programs that in no case should individual writing be graded. The course performance may be evaluated, but this evaluation evolves in dialogue between the instructor and the student. It would be difficult to construct a rationale for grading elementary and high school poems and fiction when those who teach professional writers, and are themselves professional writers, feel emphatically that such work should in no case be graded. In certain respects, teaching creative writing is like training dolphins. The best punishment is no reward. Lack of response generally comes across as a strong negative.

When the creative writing student reaches college, the most important factor to keep in mind is that the MFA student is allowed a great deal of flexibility during the program and therefore should have a good background on which to build. MFA programs encourage taking courses in other areas as all kinds of information is useful to the writer. If students are going to take advantage of this opportunity, they need to have an undergraduate education as broad as possible which would allow them to take courses in a subject such as anthropology without floundering. It is essential also for them to have a strong literature background.

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Significance of MFA Programs

Criticisms lodged against MFA programs are concerned with the uniformity which is likely to be engendered in training through an established program. The programs studied in depth suggest, however, that such rigidity is not likely to be promoted by the programs due to the flexibility which is a central part of the course of study.

A respondent in the pilot study stated that she felt the MFA program was a legitimate forum for training writers as fine artists but that she was concerned that the degree not become the only method by which writers could become writers. If we consider the ways in which writers have previously been trained, or selected, several avenues come to mind. Some writers became journalists first and moved into creative writing, others learned through rejection slips, others received literary degrees, and in earlier times writers came to the notice of patrons who enabled them to follow their craft.

Ironically, none of the earlier routes writers have taken become outmoded by the MFA degree. The school of submissions still must be attended by writers who are to become professionals. The MFA degree is not a union card: graduates of the programs must try to get the attention of publishers; and, like those looking for a patron, must find a job by which they may support themselves. If the university is a bad place for the writer, MFA graduates will have plenty of time to escape from the university in

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the additional "on the job" training they will receive. What the degree does give those who attain it is the apprenticeship training. Becky Birtha and Wally Lamb went into the program for goals extraneous to the proposed objectives of the programs. Birtha went to become employable on the college level; Lamb went to get a sabbatical which would not otherwise be granted. Both had impressive publications to their credit upon entering the programs. Neither expected to learn anything about writing in the program. Both stated that they learned very important things about writing in their study. Birtha stated:

> ...I began to gain an understanding of the usefulness of technique, just as it might be used by a dancer. It´s quite possible to dance, and even dance well, without ever studying technique. But once a dancer studies technique, a whole range of movement may be at that dancer´s disposal that was simply not an option before. I think this applies, whatever the dance form--ballet or modern, jazz or African dance, even folk dance or new forms we might dream up. And I see now that the same can be true of writing.("Writing Programs" 4)

The significant aspects of the degree appear to be just what those teaching in the programs expect them to be.

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That is: a shortening of apprenticeship through the teaching of craft, the time to write, a period in students' lives during which writing is taken seriously and demanded of them, and a community of writers.

Donald Hall feels that the community of writers is so important for writers the the MFA degree serves a useful purpose if it provides only that. What the degree does not specifically offer that Hall would like it to offer is the training in relation to the classics. He would like to see required readings in great literature. Those involved in the programs state that their students are serious enough that knowing that they need to read, they do read.

Unlike the performing arts, where training can be fairly standardized, there will always be other avenues in the conceiving arts. There certainly will be and should be the "Grandma Moses" school. When we look at MFA programs, however, and consider the number of worthwhile writers who have come out of the programs, and when we further consider the enthusiasm that the graduates have for the programs, we must conclude that the programs are one valid avenue available to writers for serving the apprenticeship in the pursuit of writing as a fine art.

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